

THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE

Brief Synopsis.

Advocate exposes the most delicate of subjects, that of an immoral preacher, and shows the fallout from his sin in his own life as well as in the lives of those strewn behind him in his wake. But how God eventually forgives, and turns the tragedies into triumphs, is a story that will touch millions and will stand the test of time. Both the story and the writing are gripping.

The Reverend Daniel Howard Sutterhall has a secret. Actually, he's had numerous secrets—brunets, several blonds, and a red head. But when he is caught in the act with the church secretary by several teens in his current church, he resorts to an Academy-award-winning performance to duck the heat. He turns the tables on the teens, accusing them of the very thing they found him doing. His theatrics convince parents and church members alike, eventually placing the teenagers under such pressure that the young woman commits suicide (or so it would appear) over being wrongly accused, and the boy is killed in a drunken car wreck while fleeing from the police.

The preacher seems to have gotten away with the sham until Johnny Chandler comes home from college for the funeral of his kid brother. While home John learns the truth, tracks down the preacher, and pummels him in the parsonage driveway. But Johnny derives little satisfaction from beating the pastor. In church the following Sunday John exposes the preacher and vows to get even with preachers, Christianity, and even God himself over his brother's death. He openly calls on Satan for help to achieve this goal, then storms out and heads back to college.

After John returns to the University of Pittsburgh, a mysterious stranger named Smith eases into his life; a stranger with unique powers and the evident wisdom to help John succeed in his desire to strike back at God. Smith suggests that John cannot pull off his revenge unless he uses a "Trojan Horse" tactic. "Become a preacher," Smith says, "build yourself up to fame, fortune, and a following of young people across the country, perhaps even around the world, then pull the whole thing down around your ears, like Samson did to the Philistines. If you steal away the young people, Christianity will die of old age in a generation."

John is opposed to this idea at first but warms to it when he finds that a shoulder injury will keep him from his life dream of playing professional football. He also finds that his childhood sweetheart, Rebekah, is now engaged to marry a graduate student from the Bible school where she attended. John, in anger, decides to go the "Trojan Horse" route suggested by doctor Smith. After graduation from Pitt, John enrolls in a Baptist seminary to work on a masters in Bible and secretly to try and win back Rebekah. His secret plan is to marry her, return to Pitt, finish his medical training, and then go into sports medicine.

After a few years, however, John is crushed by the sheer evil of his own plan. He simply cannot go through with a revenge plot that would destroy young people nationwide, as well as his own wife and his Christian parents. Nor can he follow through with something that would dishonor the dream his kid brother had of being a preacher.

On top of this pressure Rebekah is almost killed in an automobile accident. In the hospital that night, Johnny has a vision of God speaking with him. "You will NOT take her from serving me," God tells him, "But I will take her from you. It's your choice, John. Either serve me as you promised years ago or go on alone to your own chosen career." In the end Johnny makes things right with God, abandons his idea of revenge and of returning to Pitt, then drives forward with new determination to make good in his new "calling." Books two and three to follow.